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June 23, 2014

## **Americans Need Good Jobs:**

### **Support the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**

Dear Senator:

On behalf of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, a coalition charged by its diverse membership of 200 national organizations to promote and protect the rights of all persons in the United States, we urge you to support the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which would reauthorize these programs for the first time in 15 years. We congratulate the leadership of both the Senate and the House on coming to a bipartisan agreement to update and modernize our nation's largest job-training programs.

The Leadership Conference believes that in order to grow our economy and address employee skills gaps, it is imperative for all Americans to have an opportunity to acquire the education and training needed to earn a living wage. A more effective workforce education and training system is most urgently needed for disconnected youth and communities of color, who need and deserve pathways out of poverty and into the middle class. For example, even though the overall unemployment rate has decreased over the last year to an average of 6.3 percent, the unemployment rate for African Americans remains high at 11.5 percent. The situation for youth is even more dire. Among 16-24 year olds, the white unemployment rate in May 2014 was 10.8 percent; for Latinos it was 12 percent, and for African Americans, it was 24.0 percent. For young people without a high school diploma, the overall unemployment rate was 19.7 percent, but was a staggering 36.6 percent for young African Americans.<sup>i</sup>

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act maintains strong protections for populations in need, including women, youth, people with disabilities, displaced workers and English language learners, while also streamlining programs and creating accountability for employment outcomes. We are hopeful that the bipartisan bill will advance economic opportunity by:

- improving the quality of job training programs and to align training to real-world labor market needs,
- empowering people with disabilities to obtain jobs and succeed in the competitive workforce and avoiding channeling youth with disabilities into subminimum wage, sheltered jobs, and
- emphasizing and meeting the needs of youth (including disconnected and out-of-school youth), dislocated workers, under-educated adults, and English Learners.



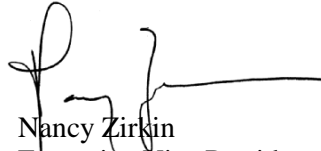
We are pleased that the WIOA takes positive steps to grow our economy, prepare more skilled workers, and provide pathways to the American dream for all persons in the United States. We urge you to vote for this bill.

Thank you for your consideration. Please direct any questions to Dianne Piché, senior counsel, at [piche@civilrights.org](mailto:piche@civilrights.org).

Sincerely,



Wade Henderson  
President & CEO



Nancy Zirkin  
Executive Vice President

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<sup>i</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics data on employment status of population of 16-24 year olds, found at <http://www.bls.gov/web/empst/cpseea16.pdf>.